

## [Clara Edwards]

June 7, 1939

Clara Edwards (Postal Clerk)

Tryon, North Carolina

Adyleen G. Merrick, Writer

Dudley W. Crawford, Reviser Original Names Changed Names

Chimney Rock Bluff Rock

Ellie Tanner Emma Taylor

Fox Mountains Coon Mountains

Clara Edwards Cara Harris

Tryon, N. C. Tippin, N. C.

Mills' Springs Gays' Springs

Grandfather Hampton Grandfather Page

Dr. Laurence Throwbridge Dr. Leo Martin

Ada Edwards Alma Dixon

Charlotte Riverton

Luther Wilson Lucian Waters

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Mr. Stearnes Mr. Sykes

Mrs. Goforth Mrs. Gable

Brevard Institute Bailey College C[?] [md;] N.C. [?]

Cara Harris, clerk in the postoffice at Tippin, North Carolina, was busy, dividing her time between dispatching mail, selling stamps and money orders, and serving at the general delivery window. She moved with the sureness that comes from knowing one's job perfectly, feeling at peace with the world and the consciousness of presenting an attractive appearance.

"I can't talk to you now, but I have two hours off for lunch, just think of it! Two whole hours. I always have plenty of time to eat, go to the beauty parlor and to rest up for the afternoon."

An hour later I was seated across from her at a table in the little cafe where they served a home-cooked plate lunch for twenty five cents, and Cara began:

"I usually go to the beauty parlor during lunch hour, but I guess I can skip it today. I generally get a finger wave or a manicure. I like to keep neat and look well-groomed. I think working women owe it to themselves as well as their public to always look smart and well cared for; many's the day I've had my hair set and gone without lunch. I got hungry before night, I'd be as empty as an old tin can, but it paid to think of 2 my appearance. Yes, my hair is pretty, everybody has a pet hobby, I guess that's mine; I take lots of pride in the way my hair looks, I never neglect it either.

"It seems strange to hear a country girl talk that way, I've always paid attention to my grooming, even when there was eleven of us in the family and there was very little to spend on fixing up. I always tried to go properly dressed. It's not what you spend for clothes, but how you wear them, mother used to tell us. She would say, 'Look at Cara

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Harris fixing up, wonder who in the world is going to notice her', but people do notice you if you are carefully dressed. I dressed then and I do now, for the satisfaction it gives Cara Harris, not for any one particular person.

"Certainly, I like to have people notice me, don't you? If you've done your best to look nice.

"But let's get serious.

"I do wish, if I am to tell you about my life, that I had time to take you out to our old home. It's been sold since my father's death but I'd like you to see where we used to live.

"Father owned seven hundred acres of land near Gays' Springs. We've had to sell it all but one hundred acres. The house belonged to grandfather Page, it's over 3 a hundred years old, you know the type, long hall through the center; big room on either side, fire places in every room. In those days wood was cheap, labor too, but Lord, I've spent many a sleepless night wondering how I could provide for the family, buy wood, pay taxes and everything. I just had to get rid of the house. I loved the old place, we were all so happy there. I wish so often I could have kept the home but it had to go. I feel I did the right thing to sell, all the family are scattered; a big house is so lonesome without a big family. It had to go, so I try not to think about it.

"My mother died when I was eleven years old, that was the beginning of our family breaking up. Mother left a little three months old baby boy, besides five other children. I was the oldest daughter. I can remember now, how strange I felt when father came to tell me my mother was gone. He patted my shoulder and said, 'Well, Cara you have to take mother's place now'. I tried to say something, I knew how father must feel too, but the words just wouldn't come; I turned and ran out into the yard and hid under the bridal wreath bush and just cried until I thought I would die too. How could I live without my beautiful mother, I jst just couldn't believe she was gone; yet father had said so.

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"After I grew calmer I realized what he had said was true, I would surely have to take mother's place, could I do it? Would the children mind me? I loved the baby; taking care of him would be a joy, but I was frightened to contemplate so much responsibility. I thought about it a long time. I made up my mind that after the funeral I'd ask father to go get old Mrs. Gable to come live with us. He went for her in a few days. Dear old soul, she lived with us for many years.

"The baby only lived eleven months, he had meningitis and was gone before we realized it. I used to sit and rock him to sleep at night and wonder what I would do if he got sick, when the time came it was all over before we could do anything or realize how sick he was.

"After the children were older and could understand about a step mother, my father married again. Allie is a good kind woman. She has always done her best for us. I was free now to go away to school. When fall came I entered Bailey College.

"All summer we had been listening to Dr. Leo Martin talk on education and its benefits; a lot of girls my age became interested. We all wanted an education so we could make something out of our lives. That is when I began to think seriously of my future. My cousin, Alma Dixon, and I later decided to go to Riverton and finish at the Southern Industrial Institute. We went that year and got along fine. It was near enough for me to be able to go home often, which helped a lot. After I graduated I was fortunate in securing a position as teacher of the third grade in a little rural school not far from where we lived. It was on Coon Mountains, in fact just at the edge of father's land, so I could live at home.

"I taught there for two years. It was while I was teaching I found out about taking the Federal examination. Old uncle Lucian Waters came by one day and told me about it. He was the rural route man, and when he came to the school house he stopped and called me out to the road. He told me they would hold the examination for Postal Clerk that week

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in Tippin and suggested I go over and try to get the job. Did I go? Well, I'll say I did, took the test and fortunately for me I passed.

"That was in the fall of 1925. I was called to work the following May. My! was I excited? I just couldn't believe my eyes when the notice came to report for duty at the Post Office at Tippin, North Carolina as a substitute clerk. We were paid sixty five cents an 6 hour for the time we worked. I guess I averaged about six hours a day. The work wasn't so hard, and the people were awfully nice. I've made lots of friends since I've had the work. Why, at Christmas time I just get a car load of gifts and always some nice checks. I've made it a rule neber never to be rude or inattentive when the Christmas rush comes. I buckle right down and work like all forty. Some days I'd feel as if I'd drop in my tracks, got so tired. You know how the Christmas rush always is, but I try to enter into the spirit of things, help the people tie up packages, suggest the best way to get them off and all that. Sometimes as I worked someone would tell me what the package contained, to whom it was going and often a little sentiment crept in too. I felt as if I were entering into the sending of the gift, you just can't imagine how many touching things happen. I really get a kick out of the holiday work even if I do get tired.

"I had to come nine miles to my work; often in bad weather I could hardly get over the road in my little old car. Some nights if it were too bad to be safe traveling I'd spend the night, but I always tried to get home if I could, because I had things I felt I ought to do there to help out. I started my day at five thirty and usually it was after six at night when I got 7 home. It didn't give much time for play, but I played some just the same.

"The Postal Department keeps a record of the number of hours substitute clerks work, after the required number have been completed we are then eligible for a regular job.

"Mr. Sykes, the postmaster at Tippin asked for a full time clerk and I was given the Job at twenty one hundred dollars a year. After thirty years of active work I can retire on full pay. Maybe, I won't work that long, you never can tell.

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"We have ten days sick leave a year with pay; fifteen for vacation, also with pay. Soon the whole, it's a swell job.

"This time next month, I'll be on my vacation. Emma Taylor and I are going west, we are taking a special tour to the exposition. I can hardly wait to get started. Last year we went to Canada. I try to get as much as I can out of these vacations, it's my only opportunity to see things. Traveling is educational too. For a long time after father died I had neither time nor money for a trip. For that reason I enjoy them all the more now. Father was killed twelve years ago in a boiler explosion at the saw mill on our place. The day of the accident stands out in my memory, never to be forgotten. I was at work. I had a sort of vision of the accident, honest I did. I can remember, I was looking at a dress I had gotten to wear to a picnic at Bluff Rock that night, when I had a queer feeling something had happened at home, and when they sent for me to come home I had really sensed trouble. Father had been terribly injured, my youngest brother was hurt too.

"Father talked to us right up to the last, although it must have cost him something to make the effort. He asked me to try to carry-on the best I could for his sake and to take care of our step-mother, and I have. We children set aside a tract of land for her and built a nice five room cottage on it when we sold the old home. She and my three step-brothers live there now. My stepmother is thrifty, she has a cow, some chickens, a fine garden and makes out all right with what I give her in cash each month.

"As each of my brothers and sisters were ready for school I set aside enough to educate them. I've helped five of them and will send the rest as they grow older.

"Our family is pretty well scattered now, some are married, others have jobs away. We all try to get home, or rather to my step-mother's, for Christmas. No, I can't make any plans for my future just yet. Sure I know I'm getting to be an old maid, but it can't be helped.

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I've been engaged three times but each time I've given up marrying. I wouldn't feel right to marry when the family still needs my help. I'll just have to try to stay young and keep my looks. Maybe , it won't be too late to marry Max, he's sweet about waiting. I think he understands just how I feel about my promise to my father.

"My land, look what time it is- I've got to get back to work or I'll get fired. I could get married then, couldn't I?"